DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 105 RC 018 913

AUTHOR Jess, Jim
TITLE Shared Superintendency and Educational Reform.
PUB DATE Oct 91
NOTE 11p.; In: The Rural Way: Traditions and Innovations. Proceedings of the Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference (13th, Manhattan, KS, October 28-29, 1991); see RC 018 911.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Legislation; Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Rural Education; *Rural Schools; *School Districts; State Departments of Education; *Superintendents
IDENTIFIERS Iowa; *Shared Personnel

ABSTRACT

Reviewing the history of rural education reform, this paper argues for a policy of improving rural schools on their strengths, rather than a policy of consolidation. Since the late 1970's, rural school reform has placed greater emphasis on developing policies and educational strategies that allow rural schools to be different from urban schools and to begin building programs around their strengths and uniqueness. As a result, during the 1980's there were considerably fewer school consolidations compared to each of the previous decades of the 1900's. An outgrowth of this trend in Iowa was the passage of legislation that allowed school districts to begin sharing students, programs, and services among school districts. This report describes the successful sharing of a superintendent among two rural counties. The biggest incentives for school districts to share a superintendent are the cost savings and the substantial amount of state incentive money that school districts receive for sharing a superintendent. In 1988 the School Administrators of Iowa surveyed 37 superintendents who were serving 2 or more districts for the 1988-89 school year. The survey found that 61 percent of the respondents believed that sharing superintendents among districts was a good idea. Shared superintendency is a viable cost-saving alternative for small, rural school districts. Also discussed are the strengths of rural education and how rural education measures up to the six national education goals. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED353105

Shared Superintendency and Educational Reform

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Barbara Havlicek
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Jim Jess, Superintendent
CAL Community School and
Alden Community School
Alden, IA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

I have been asked to address the topics of school restructuring and education reform; the shared superintendency; and, my views on the future directions for rural and small school education. It is my understanding that school districts in Kansas are working on a new state department plan for Quality Performance Accreditation and that you are hearing lots from the Kansas Legislature about "consolidation". That should come as no surprise to anyone associated with rural education, because consolidation of schools has been the most successfully implemented educational policy in America for restructuring rural schools in the Twentieth Century.

In 1980 Paul Nachtigal summarized the findings of a 2-year study sponsored by the National Institute of Education's Program on Educational Policy and Organization. In the document entitled, Improving Rural Schools, Nachtigal outlines three district themes of rural school reform - themes based on different assumptions about the nature of the problem.

The first theme holds that the problem with rural education is that it is not urban, that "the rural school itself" is the problem. Reform efforts based on this assumption attempted to mold rural education into the likeness of urban education. This approach attempted to remedy the problems of a haphazard education process caused by excessive community control of education. Even before the turn of the Century, the National Education Association's Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools defined remedies for the rural school problem including consolidation of schools which would result in a standardized, modernized community in which leadership came from professionals. The practice of consolidating schools for the purpose of improving rural education was so widely accepted by professionals and policy makers for so long that 88,000 school districts were eliminated in this country from 1930 through the 1950's. One hundred twenty-eight thousand school districts existed in 1930 and that number was reduced to 40,000 by the end of the 1950's.

The second theme of rural school reform, according to Nachtigal, was the concept of the necessarily existent small school which emerged during the mid-1950's. Although basically agreeing with the "one best-system" philosophy of the first theme, the second theme also recognized that some schools would have to remain small because of their demographics and sparsity of population. The concept of necessary small schools was given some degree of legitimacy by a series of grants provided by the Ford Foundation to be used to develop and

RC 018913

implement strategies for rural school improvement. At the termination of the $30 million Comprehensive School Improvement Program funded by the Ford Foundation, Nachtigal headed a team of consultants to assess the impact of the $30 million investment. Their conclusion was that for the most part, changes in personnel, the disappearance of project support systems and the continual pressures for returning to the status quo erased almost all vestiges of the practices explored through the Comprehensive School Improvement Program grants.

The third theme of rural school reform, according to Nachtigal, emerged in the mid-1960's with the advent of massive Federal Intervention in education in the form of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This theme was based on the assumption that the "problems of education are generic." Policy makers defined problems in terms of advantaged and disadvantaged students. Since both types of students are found in all schools, regardless of size and location, common strategies and funding formulas were deemed to be applicable everywhere. (Nachtigal, pp. 3-6)

While the three themes emerged sequentially overtime, according to Nachtigal, the later theme did not totally replace the earlier ones. Indeed, the consolidation thinking of the first theme, along with the generic assumptions of the third theme, tended to dominate education policy. Both of these themes are consistent with the "one best-system" thinking. The second theme of necessarily existent small schools did not develop the needed currency among educational decision-makers to continue, therefore, consolidation of schools remained a popular policy for improving education in rural America. The 40,000 school districts that still existed at the beginning of the 1960's were reduced to less that 16,000 in the 1980's. Political discussion on further school consolidation emerges in statehouses across the United States on a reoccurring basis whenever state monies are in short supply or education reform is on a legislative agenda.

Rural citizens have generally opposed state policies on school consolidation, especially when it affected their won local schools and communities. Although opposed, it wasn't until the mid-1970's that rural citizens, educators and policy makers began to seriously question the need to further consolidate rural schoolsin their states. As the number of rural schools in their states and districts become fewer and fewer and the geographic areas that they served become larger and larger, rural folks begin asking what the educational advantages and disadvantages were for their children if the school consolidation trend that occurred over the last seventy-five years were to continue. Many rural folks were also looking at their deteriorating communities and realizing that if they were to remain vital, their schools would play a big part in their future.

Johnathan Sher's book, Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of Conventional Wisdom published in 1978 presented a solid argument that there was no strong empirical base to support the assumptions and assertations of

school and district consolidation advocates. Sher said it was a myth that consolidation results in greater economy, efficiency and equality in rural education. He encouraged educators and policy makers to build on the strengths of rural and small schools rather than do away with them (Sher. (ed.)

I believe that a fourth theme of rural school reform emerged in the late 1970's. This theme denounced the one best-system philosophy. Instead, it placed greater emphasis on identifying differences between rural and urban education and developing policies and educational strategies that would allow rural schools to be different and allow them to begin building programs around their strengths and uniqueness. In support of this theme, rural education and small school advocacy and support groups begin to organize throughout the country which helped raise public awareness and political interest in rural education issues. In 1980 the Rural/Regional Education Association disaffiliated the National Education Association and formed the National Rural Education Association. The NREA which has state affiliates throughout the country serves as a spokesman for rural education issues in Washington. In 1983, the US Department of Education used the NREA National Conference held here at Kansas State to announce its national rural education policy which gave assurance that rural education would receive an equitable share of the information, services, assistance and funds available from and through the Department of Education and its programs. In the 1980's there were considerably fewer school consolidations compared to the number that took place in each of the previous decades of the 1900's. Emphasis instead was being placed on implementing alternative strategies for providing services to rural schools and improving the stance of rural education.

Evidence of this fourth theme of rural education reform was particularly obvious in Iowa. The Community School Movement in Iowa from 1953 through 1966 eliminated 3722 non high school districts and 836 high school districts. In 1965, the Sixty-First General Assembly required all territory of the state become part of a twelve-grade school district or be included in a reorganization petition by April 1, 1966. Territory not included in such a district or petition was to be attached to a twelve-grade district by July 1, 1966. In 1966-67 there were 455 twelve-grade school districts in operation in Iowa. During the next twenty years an average of only one voluntary reorganization occurred each year and eleven have taken place in the last five years. (Gahn)

1977, the Iowa General Assembly was looking at bills that would require another round of mandatory reorganizations. The debate centered on whether there should be 99 county wide school systems or schools with minimum twelve grade enrollments of 1,000 students. Either bill would have wiped out three-fourths of Iowa's remaining school districts. After having just settled the dust from the Community School Movement, rural Iowans were not about to accept another round of state mandated school consolidations. They organized their resistance under an organization called People United for Rural Education. PURE's

purpose was to promote the qualities inherent in rural education an pursue educational excellence that will enhance rural community life. PURE saw school reorganization by state mandate as a further erosion of rural community life and successfullyblocked the inactment of such legislation. Afterwards the leadership in PURE was committed to working with policy makers and school leaders to develop alternatives to consolidation that would provide expanded learning opportunities and educational services to rural children and youth.

In 1978, PURE was successful in getting the legislature to remove the term "reorganization" from its written policy to "encourage reorganization for the efficient operation of school districts". Although removing the term reorganization from the policy statement was viewed as aminor step to some, to PURE it was viewed as major step toward advancing other means of encouraging efficient operation of school districts. Another state policy that stood in PURE's way for proposing new ways of doing things was a school accreditation standard that disallowed two school districts from sharing students in programs and still maintain their required status as twelve grade districts. PURE was successful in getting new language adopted that would allow districts to begin sharing students, programs and services between school districts.

Sharing between districts took on various forms. Some schools begin sharing teachers, others shared students, while others combined programs. The first whole grade sharing arrangement between school districts occurred in 1980-81 when Corwin-Wesley and LuVerne boards of education took a major step by combining their high schools in Corwith and their middle schools in LuVerne and each maintaining their separate elementary schools. Also in 1980-81 the first one way sharing agreement was entered into between the Goldfield and Clarion boards of education. Under this arrangement Goldfield tuitioned its high school students to Clarion for part of their day and they returned to Goldfield to participate in their school sown extra curricular music and athletic activities programs for the remainder of their day. Later in 1986-87 the Goldfield students were tuitioned to Clarion on a full-time basis and they began participating in Clarion's extra-curricular activities programs. The Keota and Sigourney School Districts were among the first to experiment with sharing the services of a superintendent. This took place for the first time in 1984-85. (Gahn)

During the 1985-86 school year ten school districts were participating in whole grade sharing arrangements and ten school districts were sharing the services of five superintendents. Legislators were beginning to see that local school districts were willing to engage in restructuring activities for students and provide administrative services more efficiently. In order to encourage more sharing among districts, the legislature took action to provide incentive monies to schools who were willing to restructure their programs and/or services through sharing activities. By 1990-91, there were 104 school districts participating in 49 different whole grade sharing arrangements and there were 110 school districts sharing the services of 55 superintendents. In addition to these two kinds of sharing

arrangements in the state for sharing curriculum directors, subject area teachers, and specific academic or vocational education programs. In some instances the teachers travel between districts and in other instances the students are bused from one district to another.

During 1989, the Second Session of the Seventy-third General Assembly passed a major education bill, House File 535. This bill affected several elements of restructuring and it will in all likelihood slow down or perhaps bring to a halt restructuring activities in the state. The bill does the following:

Eliminates tax breaks for reorganizations
Sets July 1, 1992 as the last date a district can begin whole grade sharing and receive incentive monies for doing so.
Sets July 1, 1992 as the last date a district can begin sharing a superintendent and receive monies for doing so.
Reduces the amount of extra funding that a district receive for sharing a superintendent.
Does not eliminate in specific academic and/or vocational education programs. (Gahn)

The popularity of whole grade sharing and superintendent sharing arrangements cost the state considerably more incentive money than it had originally anticipated, which is the major reason for eliminating future restructuring incentives in HF 535. The elimination of tax breaks for reorganization, although they were substantial, will not have a major effect on schools in Iowa as only six reorganizations took place during the time tax breaks were in effect.

The shared superintendency in Iowa grew from one such arrangement in 1983-84 to 55 in 1990-91. The biggest increases came in 1987-88 when the number went from eleven to thirty-three and in 1989-90 when the number went from thirty-nine to fifty; 1987-88 was the first year that districts could receive incentive monies for sharing a superintendent and 1989-90 was the last year that the incentive monies were in effect for a five year period at their highest level.

I began sharing my services as a superintendent in 1989-90. My situation is somewhat different than most shared superintendents. My districts are in two different regional educational service areas and counties. They are not contiguous with one another and therefore, are not in a position to consider future consolidation with one another. A large number of shared superintendents are serving school districts that are also participating in whole grade sharing arrangements or their districts are anticipating reorganizing with one another in the near future.

The one advantage I had prior to going into the shared superintendency is that I had fourteen years of prior experiences in the CAL District and one and one half years of experience in the Alden District when the two boards of education

decided to enter into the Sharing Agreement.

The biggest incentive for school districts to share a superintendent is the cost savings that the districts are able to experiences. In 1990-91 the average single district superintendent's salary was $53,435. The average shared superintendent's salary was $55,695 or $27,847.50 per school district. Salaries for shared superintendencies ranged from $42,000 to $73,060 for districts with combined student enrollment from 262 to 1866. The salary for single district superintendents ranged from $34,000 to $69,591 for districts with student enrollments from 250 to 1999.

The incentive money that school districts receive for sharing a Superintendent is substantial. For example, over the five year period 1990-91 through 1994-95, the two districts I serve will received combined incentive revenues of approximately $300,000. Alden will receive $165,000 and CAL will receive $135,000. the difference is due to the fact that the revenues are generated through pupil weighting factors and Alden has 100 more students than CAL. School districts can use these added dollars however they see fit. Both Alden and CAL Districts have put their first year incentive revenues in reserve and they plan to continue doing so for the next four years. When the incentive revenues are terminated the districts will have a reserve fund to help defray their superintendency cost for another five years.

The biggest incentive for a superintendent to take on a shared assignment is that he is more likely to demand a salary that is somewhat higher than he would be able to receive if he were in a single district of comparable size.

In 1988 the School Administrators of Iowa surveyed the 37 superintendents that were serving two or more districts for the 1988-89 school year. Sixty-one percent believed that sharing superintendents between districts was a good idea, 17 percent said it was not a good idea and 22 percent were not sure. The following were some of the comments the superintendents made regarding this question.

From those responding <u>yes:</u>

Takes a lot of time; need good people working for you (principals, board secretary).

Good for the districts involved, but a lot of additional hours spent away from home at night.

It's tough on the individual; it is a financial savings to both districts. This <u>cannot</u> be a long-term arrangement.

For a short duration (2 years max). The amount of time to do both jobs well is hard to find.

Both school boards must want to make it work. Principals have more duties and must be paid more in both schools. Communities think they are getting their monies worth from superintendent.

It is not bad accept when both districts are looking at various forms of

district sharing.
Depends on attitudes of communities involved.
Yes, if districts realize you are not full time in any one district and if there are competent principals, secretaries, etc.
Yes, because you can save money and because it is easier to coordinate the sharing between two schools. If there is no other sharing, it isn't as good a situation.
Yes, in general, because of increased opportunities for small districts that will need administrative changes due to the new standards.
It removes some duplicity. Tough schedule to maintain.
Yes, as a temporary measure with eventual consolidation. This is many times the necessary communication link between districts.

From those responding no:
!. There are pluses and minuses, but overall I find it impossible to provide the leadership I should be providing.
No, because the extra work, reports, board meetings and frustrations. Not enough time. It's very difficult to keep everything straight.
It would be all right only when enough support personnel such as curriculum coordinator or assistant superintendent can be hired, it is a tough job.
It's not really a good idea--only temporary until things get reorganized.
Not for more than two or three years and only if it leads to whole grade sharing or consolidation.
Good for schools, very bad on administrators.
No lowered expectation from pre-sharing days by patrons.

Other
I haven't decided yet--ask me in a year. (Tyron)

The biggest problem I see with serving in a shared superintendency is the burn out factor. I was never one that believed in burn out, but after nearly two and one half years in my current position, I am beginning to think that it might exist. As evidence of this burn out factor, last year where I renegotiated the second year salary on my two year contract we went to compare my salary with the twenty-four shared superintendents that we used to set my original 1989-90 salary. Of the 24 original superintendents in the comparison group, only eight were still in those positions two years later and two of those eight were leaving their positions at the end of the 1990-91 school term.

I have had to make some difficult personal and professional attitude adjustments since I became a shared superintendent. Personally, I have had to accept the fact it is impossible to give two districts the same amount of attention that you can give one as a single superintendent. This was extremely hard for me to accept because I always enjoyed being totally involved in everything that went on in my school district. Professionally, I had to accept the fact that I would have to

delegate a great deal of my responsibility to other school employees in management and supervisory positions. It was difficult at first, to respond to a board member's question by saying "I don't know, but I will check with so and so and get back to you." I have come to understand, as have my board members, that small rural schools can and do run very effectively under the direct supervision of capable principals, head custodians, head cooks, and head bus drivers who work in harmony with good teachers and supporting services personnel. My conclusion, is that the shared superintendency is a viable cost saving alternative for the smaller rural school districts. It can work, if board members, school staff, community patrons, and the superintendent all accept the fact that the superintendent's role dies change when he or she goes from serving one district to two or more districts.

My views on the future directions for rural and small schools are somewhat uncertain at this time. I think our country is currently in a miserable state of confusion concerning what it wants from public education. There have always been critics of education, but since 1983 when we were declared "a nation at risk" there's been reports on top reports criticizing everything associated with our schools, the curriculum, administrators, teachers, parents and students. We've been told how bad we are so often and for so long that nobody in their right mind wants to question or debate the assumption that the American public educational system is failing to meet the needs of society for the twenty-first century.

Interestingly, as I pointed out earlier, the predominate theme in rural school reform has been "the one best system" philosophy. Mold rural education into the likeness of urban education and you will have solved the problems associated with rural schools. My friends, two thirds of our children and youth are raised and educated in urban America. If our American education system is failing so miserably, then we have to acknowledge the fact that a majority of our public school children are being educated in the "one best system" that policy makers have been trying to replicate throughout rural America during the Twentieth Century.

Having spent most of my life living in the rural midwest and working twenty-seven years as a professional educator in rural schools, there are some qualities of rural education that I value and cherish as being critical to the success of public education in America. They are inherent strengths in rural education and they have contributed to the uniqueness of the rural school experiences. The rural school strengths listed in Improving Rural Schools closely reflect my line of thinking. (Nachtigal p. 37)

- Classes are smaller, and instruction is more individualized.
- Teachers know their students as individuals and often know their family backgrounds, thus enduring a better fit between instructional program and student.

- Each student in a rural school serves an important function in the ongoing life of the school, and has a much greater chance of participating in all aspects of the educational program.
- Teachers have a sense of control over what and how they teach.
- There is room for flexibility, enabling the school to capitalize on the strengths of individual teachers.
- Administrators and teachers are on the same side, with conditions of employment still being a fairly minor concern in terms of totalenergy expended.
- School board members are known as individuals, providing the opportunity for broad participation in policy formation.
- A minimum amount of bureaucratic structure allows a higher percentage of financial and personal resources to be devoted to the instructional process and a smaller percentage to systems maintenance. Since "time on task" is one of the major factors in effective teaching, small schools have the potential for being highly effective.

In addition to the list of strengths just mentioned, I think the following list of rural school strengths are equally important to successful schools.

- A safe and caring environment.
- Community interest and support for the school, its programs and activities.
- A strong work ethic in students and staff.
- A sense of pride among everyone associated with the school.
- Parental involvement and communication with the school.
- The importance of the school to the overall life in the community.

The President of the United States and State Governors have set the direction for education by the 2000. Like it or not, the focus of education reform in this decade will center around the six national goals for American Education. At least rural schools in Kansas and Iowa have a head start in achieving the goals.

- A large share of rural children all ready start school ready to learn.
- Most of our rural school graduation rates already exceed 90 percentage.
- The Kansas and Iowa State average achievement scores on standardized tests already exceed the national average.
- Given the resources, rural schools will meet the challenge of being first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
- With our high percentage of high school graduates in rural Kansas and Iowa, we will manage to have communities of literate adults who will be capable of competing in a global economy and will continue to exercise the rights and responsibilities of good citizenship.
- Many of our rural schools are already free of drugs and violence

and offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

The challenge we face in the rural midwest is convincing our politicians to allow us to continue to experience success in our rural schools by allowing them to continue to exist.

In closing, I want to recommend that all of you read the article on The Big Lie about U.S. Education by Gerald W. Bracey which appeared in the October 1991 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan. How refreshing to read something positive about education in the United States. Bracey writes:

> Schools stink. Says who?... So many people have said so often that the schools are so bad that it is no longer a debatable proposition subject to empirical proof. It has become an assumption. But it is an assumption that turns out to be false. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that American schools have never achieved more that they are currently achieve. And some indicators show them performing better than ever. (Gerald W. Bracey p.106)

From there Bracey goes to prove his point that the conclusions of the National commission on Excellence in Education simply didn't ring true.